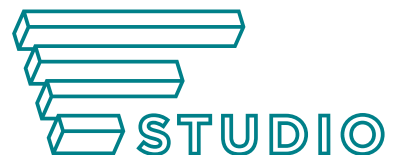


2019 NONPROFIT BRAND COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

Five Ways to Make Your Brand Messaging More Effective

FORUM ONE™



We work with many nonprofit organizations to build their brands, and we know that real success requires a smart plan and consistent, daily communications. You have a big role in this!

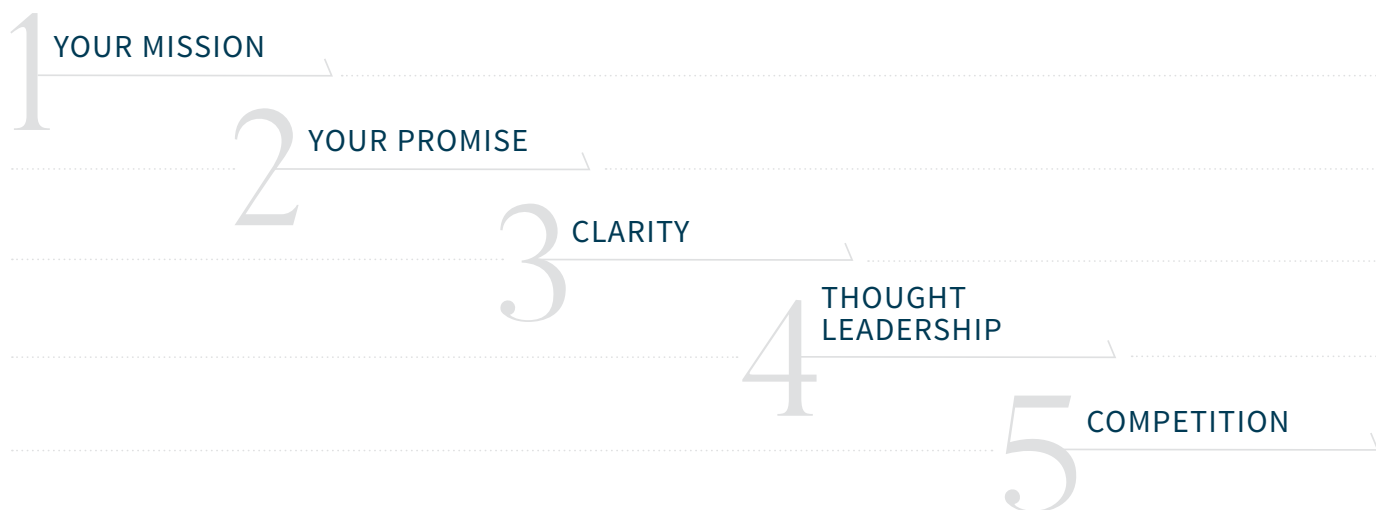
- Do you wonder if you are focusing your brand messaging on the right things?
- Does it feel like you are losing efficiency in your brand communications?
- Is your audience engaging with your brand in a productive way?

These are the top questions we hear in our discussions with nonprofit communications professionals. We've pulled together our best practices developed from years of brand-building work for mission-driven organizations, building on tested approaches and relevant metrics, and they are all here in our **2019 Nonprofit Brand Communications Guide**.

OBJECTIVE

Tell the brand story your busy advocates or potential advocates *actually* want to hear.

Let's focus on the five areas that are key to a successful brand messaging approach.



SELF ASSESSMENT

Rate yourself honestly. We recommend doing this in a group.

Have a handful of people on your team or outside your team do the assessment. It can create some interesting conversation to offer qualitative data, too. Call a short lunch or breakfast meeting, have people individually do the assessment, then have people present their answers and discuss.

If doing this individually, here are some tips to get yourself in the headspace to get an honest assessment:

- Put on the hat of your audience. Go to the Facebook or Instagram feeds of a few people that are in your audience group or represent them. Scan for a bit (but not too long). Notice some things they are talking about in their pictures and comments.
- For each question, reference the past few social media posts, your current website “home” or “about” page, and a video or other specialized channel you use regularly, as the basis for your rating.

SCALE

① NEVER ② RARELY ③ 50/50 ④ ALMOST ALWAYS ⑤ ALWAYS

1. Would your audiences be able to explain what you do and why it matters (your mission)?
2. Are you promising things you can consistently deliver?
3. Are your messages difficult to understand or inconsistent for the casual observer?
4. Are you setting yourselves up as thought leaders through your brand messaging?
5. Can you tell how your voice and identity are different from your competitors?

YOUR TOTAL

TOTALING YOUR SCORES

Lower numbers are a sign that you have opportunities to enhance your efforts. We find it is more important to identify the areas where you got the lowest numbers and start there. Though, each of the five areas are equally important, so strive for balanced numbers across the five areas.



1 PART ONE: MISSION

YOUR SCORE



Can your audiences understand what you do and why it matters?

Don't presume people know what you do or why it matters.

The mark of a good brand is one that understands what the primary audiences care about, what motivates them to action, and how the mission branding can help remove barriers to participation. We conduct brand perception interviews and surveys with audience members for nonprofits across many sectors, and the common thread is that people only engage in a substantive way when they have a clear understanding of two things:

1. **What do you do?** Our ideal situation in our audience research process is when an interviewee can explain the basics about an organization's work without having to think too much. A sign of success for an organization is when their audience can succinctly explain what they do using their own words.
2. **Why does it matter?** If someone cannot provide the "why," you will likely struggle to meaningfully engage with them. Our audience research shows us that the most engaged advocates are able to provide examples for how the organization's work is helping people and how they fit in the process.

→ **In Our Experience:** In the mission-driven world, resources can be limited and it matters how you spend every dollar. Audience research is the secret to making sure you get the most out of your messaging and branding. Our clients have told us that removing the guesswork from branding through audiences research has helped them make the most of their resources.

HOW TO GET STARTED: Start simple by writing down what you want your audiences to walk away with. Imagine they have spent a few minutes exploring your website, what do you want them to say about your organization to their colleagues, loved ones, or others?

YOUR AUDIENCE

WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO SAY ABOUT YOU

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RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Audience or market research
to understand how you can achieve these quotes.

Brand sentiment monitoring
to understand ongoing feedback about your brand.

Brand narrative development
to better tell your brand story.



2

PART TWO: YOUR PROMISE

YOUR SCORE



Are you promising things you can consistently deliver?

Consistency is more important than big promises you can't deliver.

Organizations that have a successful brand story have a clear understanding of their promise to their audiences, and it is the basis for all their messaging. There's a common theme across the nonprofits we work with: lack of consistency is usually a symptom of the underlying issue that they are unsure what their brand promise is. Here are some things to ask yourself as you think about tackling the underlying issue:

- Is your brand promise clear?
- What must happen to ensure you deliver on your promise?
- Is your brand promise something that your audience cares about?

→ **Pro-tip:** Think about your favorite brand. It doesn't have to be a nonprofit or mission-driven organization, it can be a brand that you admire and use frequently. What is the one thing that you always feel when walking away from that brand? Use that to inform how you want to craft your organization's brand promise and all the messaging methods you might use to ensure your audiences feel that way each and every time.

HOW TO GET STARTED: Thinking about your brand's interaction with your audience, what is the one thing you can promise every time audiences interact with your content, whether it is in person, via social, on your website, a video, or anywhere else?

YOUR BRAND PROMISE

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Content strategy to determine the best ways to tell this story across all mediums.

Content development to create cohesive narratives to use across these mediums.

Brand standards development to ensure your look and feel are cohesive.



3

PART THREE: CLARITY

Are your messages difficult to understand for a casual observer?

YOUR SCORE

Have you been overtaken by the biggest threat to keep you from reaching advocates?

It isn't lack of funds, or lack of interest, it is jargon. This is one of the first and easiest tweaks for organizations when working with their brand messaging. The change is really a matter of intention—deciding to cut jargon is harder than actually doing it.

There is nothing worse than visiting a website for the first time and feeling like an outsider when you read their content. There is definitely a time and place for specialized language for specific subject matter experts, but high-level messaging should be warm and welcoming to a wide variety of audiences.

→ **Pro-tip:** Don't forget about words that might have a double meaning. We have found that most mission-driven organizations use a word that is specific to their line or work that might mean something else amongst the general public. Those count as jargon, too!

HOW TO GET STARTED: Start by identifying the areas where you could be a bit easier to understand. Make a list of your most-used jargon. Now think about how you would explain this at a family gathering when noone has knowledge of this topic.

YOUR JARGONY WORD OR PHRASE	HOW YOU'D DESCRIBE IT AT A FAMILY FUNCTION
<div></div>	<div>“ ”</div>
<div></div>	<div>“ ”</div>
<div></div>	<div>“ ”</div>
<div></div>	<div>“ ”</div>
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RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Brand cleanup to ensure that your messaging is appealing across all of your properties.
- Voice and tone development and training all your teams on how to use it.
- Brand sentiment research to understand if you are hitting the mark with your content.



4

PART FOUR: THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Do you prioritize thought leadership?

YOUR SCORE

When you think about your leadership, do you also think of them as leaders in your field?

Your thought leaders are one of the most important assets of your organization. They are poised to help create content that positions you as the go-to place for your area of work. Here are some foundational steps to better position your leaders as thought leaders:

1. Take stock of all the topic areas you have leaders in.
2. Create an editorial calendar of needs that support your mission messaging. This could include blog posts, event attendance, newsletter content, and social presence.
3. Reach out to thought leaders in your organization and discuss what kinds of topics they would like to talk more about.
4. Set up a social listening or brand sentiment tool to understand how you are perceived in the field and to measure your share of the market.
5. Use research to inform changes to your strategy.

→ **Pro-tip:** Try to get the most mileage out of your thought leadership pieces. For example, if one of your experts speaks at a conference, turn it into a blog post, social media posts, and content for your newsletter. It's an easy way to increase engagement with a variety of audiences!

HOW TO GET STARTED: Make a list of all of the potential thought leaders in your organization and the ways in which they can help support our brand promise (refer to what you wrote down in Part One!).

THOUGHT LEADER

HOW THEY HELP SUPPORT YOUR BRAND PROMISE

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RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Content strategy to ensure that the right messages are getting out at the right time.

Digital campaigns to make the most of your thought leaders ideas and content.

Brand sentiment research to understand if you are hitting the mark with your content.



5 PART FIVE: COMPETITION

Do you know who your competitors are?

YOUR SCORE



Let's debunk a big misconception: "We're nonprofit. We don't have competitors."

These aren't quite the same as competitors in the for-profit sector, but they're just as important. One of the most common missteps in building a brand experience is not understanding the environment one operates within.

For nonprofits, the risk is other messages competing for your audience's attention—which translates to their time and money being invested elsewhere. Understanding who is in your space and what they provide for audiences will help you determine how you can break through the noise. Here are few of the issues we have seen arise when nonprofits don't pay attention to their comparators and competitors:

1. Lack of relevance and credibility with audiences.
2. Competing for the same funding without having a unique selling point.
3. Completing the same work that could be better accomplished through partnerships.

→ **In our Experience:** Some of your primary audiences might also be comparators or competitors! And this isn't a bad thing. Ensure that in the course of learning about your audiences, you also identify whether they might be competition or present a partnership opportunity. This will make your audience research more efficient and rich in its insights.

HOW TO GET STARTED: Make a list of the other organizations in your space: are they a direct competitor (do they do the same work as you) or a comparator (they do similar work, but not the exact same thing, they might make a good partner!).

ORGANIZATION

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COMPETITOR OR COMPARATOR?

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Competitor brand effectiveness analysis that takes a deep dive into these organizations to create a baseline and determine where you fit into the marketplace.

Brand partnership campaigns that strengthen your brand and bring more people into your mission and vision.



WHAT NOW!?

Drop Us a Line

Take Your Organizational Brand to the Next Level

We hope getting these ideas down on paper (or in a fillable PDF!) brought on some useful brainstorming for you and your team. These questions may have also opened up an overwhelming can of worms. You might be wondering what to do next. Our experts at Forum One STUDIO are passionate about helping you get the most out of your brand to achieve increased engagement with your audiences. We're happy to take a look at your answers and uncover opportunities for you to engage with your audiences.

Meet our Forum One STUDIO Experts

→ **Joey Tackett** | Managing Director, Branding

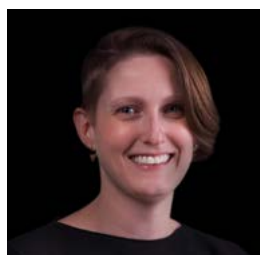
jtackett@forumone.com

Joey has built his career developing and managing brands for associations, startups, and Fortune 500 companies, with a focus on brands for cause-driven organizations and grassroots programs. Combining his training in television news with graphic arts, his approach puts visual storytelling at the core of brand building.

→ **Jeff "Smitty" Smith** | Director, Branding

jsmith@forumone.com

Smitty has spent his career helping brands clarify and communicate their value in a visually compelling way. By specializing in building comprehensive brand strategies through visual identity, print, and web design, his approach has empowered organizations to tell their brand stories.

→ **Sara Tetreault** | Director, Brand Strategy

stetreault@forumone.com

Sara is a brand strategist with over a decade of experience in understanding audiences, amplifying messaging, and creating brand strategies that increase awareness and engagement. She leads audience research studies, content strategies, and branding and messaging initiatives for mission-driven organizations.

Get in Touch!

Rob Black, Account Executive

rblack@forumone.com

703-894-4396

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